



# HORSES *of the* DAWN

WILD BLOOD

KATHRYN LASKY



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Summary: The filly Estrella, her human friend, Tio, and her small herd of horses have temporarily escaped from the evil El Miedo, but he has not given up, and as the dawn horses keep searching for the sweet grasses that will give them strength, new friends — and enemies — both human and animal, will emerge from the shadows.

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## CHAPTER 1

# Long Shadows

Joy swept through Estrella as she and Tijo galloped out of the Burnt River Clan's camp. But not just her own joy. The filly also felt the thrill of Tijo's triumph at confronting the healer, the man who'd driven the boy away from his clan. The power-hungry leader had cowered at the sight of Tijo, who'd appeared like something out of a dream, or perhaps a nightmare, wearing a coyote pelt and riding a four-legged creature the healer had never seen before.

But even that couldn't compare to the elation Estrella felt when she realized she'd caught the scent of the sweet grass once more. As long as she could lead her herd to the sweet grass, they would survive in this new world that had become their home.

As she sprinted across the windswept plain with Tijo on her back, Estrella heard the pounding hooves of the herd. She knew the distinct sound of each of the nine horses and the one mule galloping behind her, and let out a joyful whinny as she sensed a fresh spirit take over the old stallion Hold On. She turned her eyes toward him. Although almost blind, Hold On's hooves struck the ground with a new assurance. *The farther we are from humans, Estrella thought, the more powerful we become.* The band of low red mountains to the west became a blur. She tossed her head and saw clouds streaking above. Estrella lengthened her stride and stretched out her neck, feeling Tijo automatically lean forward as well. *I shall race the clouds!*

Tijo marveled at the old stallion keeping pace next to them. When Tijo met Hold On, the stallion had been blinded in a canyon fire. His vision had improved slightly, but to this horse, the world was still mostly a shadowy one. While Hold On might not have been able to see the red blur of the mountains or the racing clouds, he could see the slashing shadows cast by the galloping horses around him. In his near blindness, the stallion had become a sifter of shadows, reading the gradations of darkness to light with a deep sensitivity. At the same time, his other senses had been honed to the sharpness of a bone knife's edge.

"You smell the sweet grass?" Hold On asked as he drew up next to Estrella. Although they'd been galloping for some time, he sounded hardly winded.

“Yes,” she said, though *smell* barely began to describe the sensation. It was as if the grass were streaming through her veins. She could almost taste it. With each stride, she felt the heady mixture of ecstasy and relief. She thrust out her powerful legs and gobbled the land, streaking across the plain like the shooting star for which she had been named.

Sky tossed his head back and whinnied shrilly, “Race!” His playful challenge peeled into the air and electrified the horses. Sky and Verdad bolted across the hard ground and were soon leading, but it didn’t take long for Estrella to catch up.

“Race to where?” Arriero asked, pulling up next to her. The heavy stallion caught Estrella’s look of surprise and snorted. “What? You think an old stallion can’t run fast?”

“I won!” Sky whinnied triumphantly as he skidded to a halt by a large boulder. His odd eyes, one blue and one almost black, glittered.

“You didn’t win,” Verdad protested. The creamy-white colt was dancing impatiently. In contrast to the rest of his coat, his legs were black from his fetlocks to his hocks. “You just declared the finish line. You can’t just make up the rules of a race like that.”

“Why not?” Sky said with a snort.

“Not in the middle of a race.”

Yazz the mule trotted up to them.

“My goodness!” Corazón exclaimed. The old mare, who had also just arrived, turned to look at Yazz. “Look who’s here!”